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CHAPTER IV

VALUES

a. *Good company*

One of the values most constantly stressed by the Nyakyusa is that of *ukwangala* which, in its primary sense, means 'the enjoyment of good company' and, by extension, the mutual aid and sympathy which spring from personal friendship. It implies urbane manners and a friendliness which expresses itself in eating and drinking together, not only merry conversation, but also discussion between equals, which the Nyakyusa regard as the principal form of education. 'It is by conversing with our friends', said one of our witnesses, 'that we gain wisdom (*amakala*); it is bad to sit quite still in man's company. A man who does this is a fool; he learns no wisdom, he has only his own thoughts. Moreover, a man who does not spend time with other people is always dirty, he does not compare himself with any friends. For we learn cleanliness of body in company, those who are dirty learning from their more cleanly friends. Again, if a man is accused of some crime and brought before the chief and is unable to defend himself easily and with eloquence as much as him and say: "What is the matter with you? Do you live all by yourself? How is it that you are so foolish?" Wisdom and cleanliness are the two great things to be learnt in company. It is bad to live alone far from other people, such a man learns nothing: he never learns to express himself well, to converse wittily with friends, or to argue a case with eloquence. It is better to live with other people.'

'To live with other people', says our informant, but he implies 'to live with contemporaries'. For *ukwangala*, in the sense of discussion and easy give-and-take, can never occur between men and women, and is made difficult between men of different generations by the respect required of sons for their fathers. Since men are held to acquire manners, eloquence, and wisdom only in company it is necessary, the Nyakyusa argue, that they should build in villages, rather than in scattered homesteads, and since

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abasangalo is only possible between contemporaries' they must build with contemporaries. The value set on **abasangalo** is thus related to the age-village; male contemporaries build together, and the company of, and good fellowship with, his age-mates is what creates a man of wisdom and character. Such is the Nyakyusa view of society.

For conversation to flow merrily and discussion to be profound there must be *ifyakusangalala*—'the wherewithal for good fellowship', that is, food and drink—and very great stress is laid on sharing these. Men and boys are expected to eat regularly with age-mates. Traditionally, fathers and sons never ate or drank together—to do so was held to be incompatible with the respect due from son to father—and men sought the company of equals at meals. From the time a small boy begins to herd he is encouraged to bring home two or three friends to eat with him, and in turn he visits each of them. Since boys have no fields of their own until they marry, but co-operate in cultivation with their parents, it is to their own mothers they go for food, and parents are proud of a son bringing many friends. 'Perhaps', said Angumbwike, 'a son will come with his friends and cut a huge bunch of bananas, and take thick milk and eat with them. When the father comes back his wives will tell him: "Your son has eaten all the thick milk and cut a banana bunch!" Then he will ask: "How many men were with my son?" "Six!" "Ah, he's a chief!" the old man will say, smiling proudly.' 'And formerly if a young man came home often alone to eat, his father would beat him, or even take a spear and wound him, and when people asked why he would say: "This great fool comes alone to my plate, again and again." It is good to eat with friends, for boys to go round in groups of four or five.'

After marriage each man is cooked for by his own wife, but he continues to eat with his friends, bringing them to his home or going to their's. The first wife to come to a young man's village is said to have a hard life. 'She has to draw water and cook for all the young men of the village—they come to drink, and to wash, and they beat her with a stick if she refuses them. No, the

* Abasangalo is sometimes used with reference to relatives as well as to village-mates, as in the phrase 'nilibasangalo kwanse nabakolwanse bobe', meaning 'he is now on good terms with his relatives', but in the fullest sense it can only be used with reference to contemporaries.

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meat is offered in the bride's father's grove; the two symbols of first intercourse—treatment with *undumila* medicine and jumping over fire; the recognition of the end of childhood by calling on the bride's mother to put her down off her back; the insistence that she show modesty before her father and his fellows as before a father-in-law; and the taboo on crossing water lest her menstrual flow become like a river.

The twin ritual is characterized by the fear of infection from too great potency, and the treatment with scalding medicines to 'burn' the twin birth.

Sometimes our informants gave different interpretations of the same symbol and there was no agreement between them, as with the stem of bananas stolen in the Kukwe death ritual, and the bunch of flowers brought back from the stream. Nsyani said stealing the bananas symbolized that 'we may now eat other people's food', and Mwamulenga that it was a symbol of driving away disease. Kakuse, the doctor, interpreted the bunch of flowers brought back from the stream as a symbol of the shade which was brought home; Mwamulenga saw picking and carrying flowers as yet another symbol of the actions of a madman. Though there was general agreement over the interpretation of many symbols, it is possible that some have no commonly accepted meaning, but suggest different things to different people. It is clear, however, that with the Nyakyusa, as with ourselves, one symbol has often several associations for the same person, and Kasitile and the more self-conscious of our informants were aware of this. For Kasitile the banana in the death ritual is the corpse and the pumpkin-seeds in it the shade; it is also faeces which madmen eat; it is also, in the puberty ritual, the male organ and the seeds are the semen. Eating a banana is a symbol both of copulation and of the actions of a madman. Conversely, the same object or action is symbolized in many different ways—there are nine or ten symbols of sex intercourse, and twenty of driving away the shade, recorded in the texts quoted above.

When an action recurs in different rituals, informants almost always interpreted it in the same way in each context: the exception was the trampling dance (*ukukanya ingenge*) interpreted as a way of 'driving away the shade' in the death ritual and a 're-joicing' in the puberty ritual. It was always explained as 'customary'. 'Father and grandfather did it.'

This brings us to the ultimate explanation given for all the

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rituals: 'they are customary' (*lukwiko*), 'they come to us from long ago', 'our fathers and grandfathers performed them'; and established in the nature of the universe: 'Kyala made us black people like that.'

(*b*) *The nature of the shades*

The nature of the shades is revealed in Nyakyusa rituals, and we are now in a position to summarize their attributes.

The shades, 'those who have risen from the dead', are the dead members of a lineage and, unless they were ruling chiefs when alive, they have power only over their own kinsmen, and are concerned only with behaviour between members of the lineage, not with behaviour towards outsiders. As we have seen, the shades of her father's lineage 'move aside a little' from a woman when marriage-cattle and the bull of puberty have been given for her but, if these are still owing, it is thought that her child as well as she herself may be made ill by her father's shades. Membership of a lineage is determined by the passage of marriage-cattle: a child belongs to the group which provided cattle for its mother. Therefore, it is argued, the shades of the lineage which provided the cattle, and they alone, if the payment has been made in full, have power over children. If no cattle have been given the child is in the power of the mother's shades. But there are difficulties over the *ikipiki* medicine, for only that of the genitor's lineage can safely be used, and its use implies membership of the lineage that provides it. There is a further idea that shades only have power over those living in a homestead of their lineage. 'A child is never made ill by the mother's shades when it is in the father's homestead, only when it is with its mother's people.'

The dead dwell beneath (*pasi*), in 'the land of the shades' (*lubaspake*), which is a shadowy reflection of the land of the living, with homesteads and gardens, wives and cattle, villages and chiefdoms.

MWAKAMBO: People think that in the land of the shades they build homes like we do, they marry wives, they have children, they plant food and build houses. I heard this always from old men, but they only guess. They say: 'Perhaps it is nice, perhaps horrible.' They do not know very much. They fear to die. I have never met any old pagan man who wanted to die, they always fear. Property is important. People are much taken up with the idea that riches are there in the land of the shades. They say: 'If a man dies his fathers come to receive